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WHAT IS IT TO-DAY?

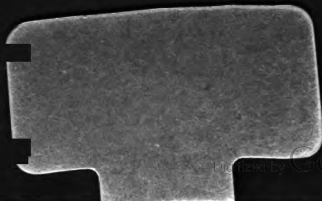


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# WHAT IS IT TO-DAY?

OR,

Sunday half-hours with an Invalid.

*Meditations*

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LONDON: WILLIAM MACINTOSH,  
24, PATERNOSTER ROW.

*101. g. 88.*



## INTRODUCTION.

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WHO has not learned for himself, in some measure at least, how wearying is the general monotony of a sick-room to the mind as well as to the body of the sufferer? There may be comfort, nay, even luxury, around; the suffering may be accepted with cheerful submission to the will of Him who doeth all things well; that "patience should "have her perfect work," may be the earnest desire of the heart, yet the pressure of the never-varying sameness often lies sorely on the weary spirit; and the accepted fact, that the patient is unequal to the least exertion, mental as well as physical, is in itself a burden which can only be duly weighed in the scales of experience.

But after all, except in the case of very severe illness, where is the mind that, entirely deprived of external occupation, will not fall back upon the most wearing, the most exhausting of all occupations—that of feeding on itself? Surely, any assistance it may receive to withdraw it from this, and present it with more healthy interests, must prove both a welcome and valuable relief.



It was with this object in view—to cheer the sick-room of a dear friend—that these letters on the history of Jonah were written. Each Saturday's post brought its Sunday's messenger, and the fresh interest of "What is it to-day?" gave its own pleasure to the perusal of what, in its simple and unpretending character, might have but little to recommend it under other circumstances. They are now given to the public, not only with the hope that others who are weak and weary may find some enjoyment in their contents, but still more as a suggestion to those who have dear ones thus excluded from the healthful varieties of outer life—to whom similar contributions on their part may prove an unspeakable boon. It is but "the cup of cold water;" but that given "in the name of a disciple" to the thirsty soul, how good is it!

*January, 1865.*

# WHAT IS IT TO-DAY?

OR,

## SUNDAY HALF-HOURS WITH AN INVALID.

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### I.

JONAH i. 1—3.

“Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

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Teach us, O heavenly Father, by Thy Holy Spirit, rightly to understand the instruction contained in this portion of Thy holy Word. We ask in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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My dearest —

The wonderful dealings of God with His sinful children, His patience, His long-suffering and His unchanging love, are so strikingly manifest in the whole history of Jonah, that I cannot but think we may (ever

looking for His teaching) learn much that is not only interesting but profitable to our own souls in the study of it. And I do believe that the more closely we follow Jonah, in tracing the working of sin in his heart, and its sad results; and the more deeply we ponder God's wonderful works in the correction and instruction of him, the more clearly shall we recognize in the one the mirror which reflects our own image, and in the other the ways of Him whose path is in the great deep, and whose footsteps are not known,—of Him, whose dealings are at the time so often mysterious, and whose loving kindness in them all ever shines out so bright and clear, when His work is done, and the dross being separated from the silver, there comes forth a vessel fitted for the finer.

The word of God comes to Jonah; the voice, "arise," sounds in his ear; he hears and understands the command, and instant action is the result. At other times when we read of God's word coming to His servants, we find it meeting with a different reception. Frequently there is a hesitation about their obeying the command; a diffidence about their ability to comply; as we find in the cases of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. These difficulties God removes, teaching them that it is on Him they are to rely, and not on themselves; that it is Him whom they are to fear, and not their fellow men; and so, strengthened and refreshed, He sends them on their way. But Jonah acts not thus; he hears in silence; he loves not what he hears; his heart rebels, and fain would hear no more; but the arrow has entered his soul; he can no longer rest; the message has stirred up the sin that was within, and he feels that he must be up and doing. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest,

whose waters cast up mire and dirt." In the guilty impulse of the moment he rises up "to flee unto Tarshish." Alas! poor Jonah. Was there no voice within to whisper, "Thy God is omnipresent, thy God is omniscient; whither shalt thou go from His Spirit? whither shalt thou flee from His presence?" Did nothing tell thee how vain was the effort to hide thee from thy God? Ah, no! Jonah stopped not to listen; the lesson was to be learned in a different way—by that bitter practical experience, which brings home to us all how grievous it is for man to strive against his God. Perhaps, as Jonah hurried down to the sea-side; he may have thought it possible that he should find no ship ready to start, and have dreaded a check being thus put to his guilty flight; but no—every thing seemed to prosper him. The ship was ready, the wind was fair; it looked as if they but waited for him ere they spread their sails and depart. He pays the fare, and goes down into the ship; his object seems to be almost accomplished.

How little he thought whose Almighty hand made everything thus smooth before him; how little he thought who it was that had removed every impediment in his way; leaving him thus to follow his own way, that He might prove to him what was in his heart. Dear friend, can we not see ourselves in all this? We are going on in our usual course of life, perhaps, when, all at once, some duty, clear and obvious, but new and repugnant, comes prominently before us. We start at the sight, and turn away. A kind friend tries to press it home upon us, or perhaps conscience is the only instrument God brings to bear upon us at the time. At all events the idea is so repellent, that we determine not to parley with it, for fear

it should gain further entrance. We cannot bear to do it, and think that by shutting our eyes tight we shall exclude the vision; we soon find that we are mistaken; it has penetrated further than we thought, and restless and unhappy we can no longer sit still. Jonah-like, however, the more uneasy the thorn in our side makes us, the greater our aversion becomes to the supposed cause of all our misery; and although, to get rid of ourselves, we would do almost anything, we still keep our faces steadily turned from the light, lest our deeds should be reproved. Thus did Adam and Eve when they hid themselves amongst the trees of the garden, and thus has every fallen child of theirs done, when he has chosen to walk in the light of the fire, the sparks of which he has himself kindled. Vain effort! "This shall ye have of Mine hand" (saith the Lord) "ye shall lie down in sorrow."

Still, punishment is not always allowed to overtake us at once; we, too, must learn to know ourselves; and can we not, in looking back, often trace *when* we went down to Joppa, and stepped on board the ship bound for Tarshish? Can we not remember how we "paid the fare," and half-persuaded ourselves that all was right? We did not say that "we fled from the presence of the Lord,"—but what did God call it when we turned our back upon what we felt was right? Ah, surely, conscience, thus far thou canst recognize thyself in Jonah!

In true love, yours, ———.

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## II.

## JONAH i. 4—10.

“But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

“Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his God, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

“So the ship master came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

“Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; what is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

“And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

“Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.”

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Teach us, O heavenly Father, by thy Holy Spirit, rightly to discern the instruction Thou dost intend us to derive from these Thy dealings with Thy servant Jonah. We ask in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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How many lessons of love and mercy these dealings contain, dearest ———. They shew us with what a watchful eye and unforgetting heart our God follows His rebellious children. God loved Jonah too much to allow

him to go on in his iniquity; and even while he was grieving the Holy Spirit by his sin, He would not depart from him, but followed him with chastenings and rebukes, till He constrained him to acknowledge his transgression, and to be sorry for his sin. But we see not only God's watchfulness, but His almighty power, so signally displayed here. How it calls to mind those verses in Isaiah xl. 22, and Nahum i. 3, "It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers,"—the mere nothings that we are when we set ourselves in opposition to God,—that "Lord" who "hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet,"—that God who is omniscient and omnipresent, ah, how entirely is He omnipotent also! He sends out a storm to rebuke the rebellious Jonah, one which causes the hearts of the poor heathen sailors to quail before it, and to seek with eager haste the aid of powers greater than themselves: but Jonah hears it not, heeds it not; he is "fast asleep."

I cannot but think that this sleep of Jonah's is one of the exquisite touches of description of nature, which we find in the Bible, and that this sleep of exhausted mind and body shews us to what a pass Jonah's haste and guilty fears had reduced him; and that in him, lying there so utterly prostrate, we have a striking picture set before us of the results of that service of sin and sorrow, in which those who "promise themselves liberty," find at last that they have engaged,—that service whose "wages," we are told, "is death." And yet again, I think we see in it God's gentle and merciful dealings with us, even in the midst of our sins; for we find that Jonah awoke from that slumber in calm possession of his previously agitated senses,

and strengthened, I doubt not, to endure the chastisement which he felt that he was about so justly to receive. I think that God, in His infinite love in Jesus, sent poor Jonah that refreshing sleep, as He sent the food by His angel to Elijah of old, because the way before him would otherwise have been "too great for him." And O, dear friend, have we not thus often and often experienced in God's dealings with us, that while He sends us the needful chastisement, and while the scourge is often sore and sharp, He never fails, in some gracious way or other, "to temper" His "wind to the shorn lamb;" He sends us some pause for quiet rest, or ministers to us some refreshment by the way, so that though we dare no longer despise His chastenings, He yet keeps us from altogether fainting under them. I think, perhaps, there is no time at which a Christian heart is more sensitive to the undeserved mercies that are bestowed upon him, than when, thus alive to the nature of God's dealings with him, by the light of the Holy Spirit's teaching he discerns love, everlasting love, in them all.

But the poor sailors understood not all this, neither, I should suppose, did Jonah at the time, and yet we see into what perfect submission to God's will his own was brought. No more disguise, no more evasion; he stands forth at once, and with the calm simplicity of truth answers the questions put to him. They have previously cast lots, and the lot has fallen upon him. This does not surprise him, for he knows that although "the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." His repentant heart re-echoes the justice of it, and he stands still before his God. Thrice happy Jonah! Thy God is with thee still; He is "teaching thee to profit,"



and though "Satan has desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat," Jesus has "prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Calmly he tells these fearful and wondering sailors that he has been fleeing from before the face of the Lord, whom he feared,—“The God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” God grant us grace thus heartily to acknowledge our own guilty wanderings from Him, that confessing and forsaking our sins, we, like Jonah, may find mercy from Him, “with whom is forgiveness, that He may be feared.” “When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”

Ever in true love, your attached ———.

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### III.

JONAH i. 11—16.

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

“And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shalt the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

“Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

“Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech Thee, O Lord, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee.

“So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

“Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.”

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Teach us, O heavenly Father, by Thy Spirit, for Jesu's sake. Amen.

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Surely, dearest — — —, each step as we advance in this wondrous history, must teach us more and more to wonder, and adore Him who hath said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." I really do feel in the considering of it, that we must "put off our shoes from off our feet, for" that "the place whereon we stand is holy ground." It does seem so very wonderful the way in which God caused Jonah's misconduct to redound to His glory in everything; how at one stroke He overturned all his schemes for gaining his own way, emptied him of all self-confidence, forced him to acknowledge his sin, and at once changed him from a skulking, terror-stricken backslider, into a dignified preacher of truth, calmly pointing out and reprobating his own sin, and directing the poor trembling heathen, on whom his sin had brought so much misfortune, how they were to deal with him, and foretelling its happy result. It is all so entirely unnatural to us, and yet it flows on with such ease and simplicity of truth in its narration, that we, having been used to hear it from our childhood, do not half realise how wonderful it is. I remember I used to have but three feelings with regard to this incident in the life of Jonah, first, how wrong he was not to do what God told him; secondly, great pity for his fearful punishment; and thirdly, great pleasure in God's forgiving and rescuing him from his perilous position. After a while I began to see, in studying it more closely, that there was something to be thankful for before that, viz., God's giving him faith whilst in the whale, to remember Him, and to pray. But I confess that until

I came back to the subject this time, I never felt that Jonah's gratitude must really have been awakened at a much earlier period, even at the time in his history which we are now contemplating, when, even before his visible punishment had been inflicted, he had been led, like David, to say, "I have sinned against the Lord,"—and God, by thus using him as His instrument in spreading the knowledge of His great name amongst the heathen, seemed to have given him the assurance, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." I do not mean to say that when Jonah told them to throw him into the sea, he was aware that his body would not die; but I am quite sure that he went down into the deep in the full assurance that he was a pardoned sinner; and that although Satan had been allowed "to sift him as wheat," yet God would not allow his faith to fail. And even at that very moment, I am sure he would have borne thankful testimony to the truth, that "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." How thankful he must have felt in being thus once more permitted to witness for God, and to be rescued from the ignominious position in which his own cowardice had placed him. And let us not overlook the unexpected effects produced on his companions by his announcement and confession. We should have thought that they would have been filled with fury at him for involving them in such jeopardy, and would have scarcely waited to hear him out ere they hurled him into the surging deep; but no—"When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him," is God's word, and must ever hold true; and instead of Jonah's disclosure of his being

the source of their misfortune producing anger against him, it seems to have resulted in feeling sympathy and respect towards him ; and above all, to have the one great and desired object of all God's dealings with him, to draw their thoughts and mind away from the poor instrument either of good or evil, and to lead them to cast themselves and their troubles at the feet of Him in whom alone there is help.

Oh, dear friend, may we in meditating on these things learn the lesson they teach, that every circumstance of life is ordered and overruled for good by our God ; that if we sin, or if others sin, the punishment will come surely and certainly, but it is not for us to distribute, nor to fear. We should fear to sin, and we should grieve to see others sin ; but when God's check comes, when His chastening comes, let us ask for the spirit He gave to Jonah to accept it, and neither to despise it nor to faint under it. And when we find ourselves involved in the punishment due more immediately to the sins of others, let us ask that we may receive it as these poor heathen did—straight from God, and pity and pray for the sinner, whilst abhorring the sin.

Ever your loving ———.

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## IV.

JONAH i. 17; ii. 1—4.

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

“Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly,

“And said, I cried by reason of my affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me.

“Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again towards Thy holy temple.”

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Teach us, O heavenly Father, by Thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus’ sake, to profit by the instruction conveyed to us in this Thy dealing with Thy servant Jonah. Amen.

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What a strange feeling of comfort, dearest — — —, we have in following poor Jonah into the deep, when we read that “the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow him up.” It seems a very dreadful fate, and yet, when it was what “the Lord had prepared,” we know that it must have been the best; and we feel, besides, that He had neither left nor forsaken His poor sinful servant, but was just as watchful and careful over him, when punishing, as when blessing him. I do not think Christians enough consider this, and therefore we do not derive the comfort which we are intended to draw from it. We are inclined to think that God is like ourselves, and

that He loses interest in us in proportion as we fall away from Him. When a man is conscious that he has behaved badly to his fellow-man, especially if it be after the receipt of love and kindness, he feels that he can no longer expect to be regarded by him as he had been, for he no longer deserves it. And it is this same feeling, lurking in our hearts towards God, that makes us, when conscious of special sin against Him, imagine that His love for us has been estranged, and that His chastenings and correction are administered in displeasure; leaving us in some measure deserted, until we endeavour to retrieve our character, as it were, and shew by our conduct that we wish to do better for the future.

Now by this large admixture of error with truth, we bring much sorrow to our own souls, and greatly dishonour our God. He has said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;" and in this love, as in every other attribute of God, there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning. God's dealings with man *are* many and varied, according to his necessities; but we can never pray too earnestly to have it graven on our hearts, that the source from which they spring, the love which dictates and overrules all, is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever;" that love which, having given His Son for us, has also "with Him freely given us all things." It is this watchful and unchanging love shining out through the dark cloud hanging over Jonah, that gives us fresh courage for him, and makes us feel that though "cast down, he was "not destroyed;" that he was still in the hands of his loving Father, who had carefully prepared

all things needful for him. We remember, when God gave David the choice of three kinds of punishment for his sin in numbering the people, he at once chose to fall into the hands of the Lord rather than of men; and we are all conscious of the feeling of preferring even pain to be administered by the hand of those who, we know, love us, although, alas! it is not all of us who can thus regard God. But that Jonah could, is evident from the opening of the second chapter—"Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord HIS God, out of the fish's belly."

It is too much for us to go on to day into the further proofs in the following verses, of how he took every drop in his cup of sorrow as coming straight from his Father's loving hand. I wish now, simply to seek a blessing upon our own souls, on the contemplation of the Lord's hand visible in the preparation of the means of punishment, as well as in the deliverance from it. Also, the faith given to Jonah to accept it as such, and to kiss the rod, whilst praying for mercy.

May his God and our God, his Father and our Father in Jesus, grant us like precious faith in answer to the prayer of Him, who ever lives to intercede for those whom He died to save.

Ever in true love, your attached ———.

## V.

## JONAH ii. 2—7.

“I cried by reason of my affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou hearest my voice.

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me.

“Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple.

“The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

“I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.”

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O heavenly Father, we pray Thee by Thy same searching teaching Spirit to lead us to pour out our hearts before Thee at all times, that we may also be witnesses of the truth that Thou hearest us always, when we come to Thee in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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We sometimes feel it hard to believe, dearest ———, the truth of what St. Paul teaches us, that “there hath no temptation taken us but such as is *common* to man,”—and when we read in St. Peter’s Epistle, with regard to the temptations of Satan,—“whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that *the same afflictions* are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world,”—we are still



inclined to cherish a lurking belief that there are peculiarities in our case unknown to others. But when God's Spirit turns our eyes away from ourselves and leads us along side by side with some poor fellow-pilgrim, as his struggles and sorrows and sins and falls are recorded with unvarnished truth in the sacred page, how surely, although indirectly, do we feel in deep sympathy to acknowledge, that "as face answereth to face in water, so the heart of man to man." We sit down by Jonah and listen to his heart pouring forth its confessions of sin and grief; its acknowledgment that affliction had compelled him to return, as God says in Hosea, "In their affliction they will seek Me early,"—his joyful testimony that the Lord had heard him even from the lowest depths into which he had sunk; his humble acceptance of punishment straight from God—"Thou hadst cast me into the deep;"—"all Thy billows and waves passed over me." We hear, also, his acknowledgment of his flesh and heart failing him, and when he could no longer see God, his feeling as if God could no longer see him—"Then said I, I am cast out of Thy sight." Then the triumph of faith, so touchingly expressed in the words, "Yet will I look again toward Thy holy temple"—grasping the promises of his God, even, as it were, in his death-struggle; like Job, saying, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Then the continued account of accumulated sorrows; "the waters compassed me about even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever"—no apparent hope or chance of escape,—  
 "YET hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O

Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord : and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple." Yes, that God who had not cast thee off in sin, Jonah, did not forget nor forsake thee in the sorrow consequent on that sin. O how our hearts respond to this testimony ! How they testify within us, as we go along, step by step, that just so it has been with us ; we too have sinned ; we too have wished to have our own way rather than God's ; we too have been chastened and corrected, and by reason of our affliction have been mercifully constrained to call upon the Lord. We too have heard His Spirit within, witnessing to our poor fainting hearts that He has heard our cry ; we too, like Hagar, have been refreshed in the wilderness by water from the well, which we feel must be named Beer-lahai-roi, ("the well of Him that liveth, and seeth me.") We too have been tempted to think that we are shut out and cut off from God's sight, because our own poor eyes can no longer discern Him ; and yet we too have been led by His Spirit to "look again toward His holy temple." We too have felt the clouds closing round us, darker and thicker than ever—the waters entering into our very souls ; and yet to us too the voice has penetrated, witnessing that our "life is hid with Christ in God," where death and hell can never enter. On us too the Sun of Righteousness has shone forth with healing on His wings, and we too can joyfully declare that He who has "shewn us many and sore troubles has quickened us again," and "brought us out into a wealthy place."

May such experience in ourselves, and such instruction conveyed to us in the experience of others, be

blessed to us of the Holy Spirit, in making our wills more supple, our desires more holy, and our faith more entire, for Jesus' sake.

Ever your much loving ——— .

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## VI.

JONAH ii. 8.

“They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”

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O heavenly Father, we pray Thee to open our eyes by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. We ask in the Name, and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

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What a touching commentary on his own trouble and its origin, dearest ———, is it not? How plaintively Jonah gives utterance to the Spirit's teaching within, and to the lesson he was in the act of learning by sad experience—“They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”

Ever since Eve first listened to the whispers of the beguiling serpent, telling her that the result of her transgression would be, that she should be “as gods, knowing good and evil,” the inherent vanity of the heart of man stirred up within her has been transmitted as a fatal heirloom to each one of her descendants; and every child that is born again of the Spirit, will find that one of the most subtle and dangerous foes to his peace and happiness, with which he has daily to contend, is this specious

vanity of his own heart, which, chameleon-like in its properties, is capable of assuming so many varied forms and hues, that he finds himself forced to exclaim in bitterness of soul, "Who can tell how oft he offendeth! cleanse Thou me from secret faults." We have but to look back through Scripture history to see the truth of this, and we have, alas! but to look into our own hearts to see its confirmation. Heart after heart we see stumbling and falling: judgment after judgment succeeding warning after warning, in consequence of this fatal observance of lying vanities; as David says in Psalm xciv. 11, "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity." This vanity begets self-reliance; this self-reliance turns away our eyes from God; opens our ears to Satan's suggestions; stretches out our hands to take the forbidden fruit; leads our feet in the forbidden path, and, except God in His infinite mercy in Jesus sends His angel to stop us in the way, hurries us on in the "forsaking of our own mercy," swiftly to destruction. Ah! how surely do many of God's providences witness against us, that the only reason of "our not being consumed" is because "He is the Lord, He changes not."

You see how clearly the Holy Spirit had revealed to Jonah, that, though circumstances were so sadly changed with him, there had not a shadow of a change taken place in God; that though clouds of thick darkness were around him, the Sun of Righteousness was shining warm and bright in the horizon as ever; that, in fact, as Isaiah testifies, "The Lord's arm was not shortened that it could not save, nor His ear heavy that it could not hear; but his iniquities had separated between him and his God." And, sad as that thought was, there was

great comfort in it, just as there must have been to the poor prodigal son in the remembrance of his father's home of happiness and peace, to which he might return. Just think what a different case *his* would have been if his Father had given him the portion of goods, and gone away and *left him*,—going he knew not whither! Why, when he fell into distress, it would have ended in despair; he would have exhausted all hope, and could have found no way of escape. But oh, when he remembered, however bitterly, that it was he who had forsaken his Father; that Father who would never, no never, leave him; never, no never, forsake him; while it awoke the keenest sense of his own unworthiness, it, at the same time, brought home the precious truth to his aching heart, that that Father and that home were *still the same*, and prompted the longing desire, and at last the earnest resolve, to “arise and go.” And oh, dear friend, is not this the influence that such remembrances are intended to have upon us? Are they not messengers to us from the Lord, saying to us as they did to Jonah, “Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts.” “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” God grant that our heart's response may be, “Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God.” How different does the rod of chastisement appear, when we at the same time recognise in it *the Shepherd's crook*, with which He gathers in the stragglers of the flock, who, tempted by the verdure of other pastures, are wandering on the edge of the dangerous precipices, from which His love must needs rescue them, even though a rough stroke is requisite to bring them back to the right track. How often I have

watched the shepherd at home sending his dog to bark at and chase back the outlying ones of the flock, and seen them fly panting and frightened before him, little knowing the tender care that prompted the rough usage. And is it not thus with us?

Ever your loving ———.

## VII.

### JONAH ii. 9.

“But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.”

Shine into our hearts we beseech Thee, our triune Jehovah, and reveal to us, by Thy Holy Spirit's light, the eternal truth contained in this portion of Thy holy Word. We ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Thus we see, dearest ———, the Refiner's fire has done His work; the dross has been purged from the silver, and the great Artificer sees His own image reflected in the molten ore. Ah, how eagerly does He stretch out His loving hand to draw forth from the furnace the vessel now “fit for the finer.”

We cannot mark too minutely the change wrought; we cannot seek too earnestly to trace, in the altered lineaments of character, the wondrous power of our God. Jonah, who fled from God in sunshine, is taught to trust His faithfulness and truth in the deepest darkness: he who thought himself wiser than God, and rebelled against

His orderings, is constrained to confess that he had "observed lying vanities," and in so doing had "forsaken his own mercy." He who, no doubt, had thought himself ready and willing to do great things in his own way for God, has now learned that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." He therefore attempts no more to "bring vain oblations," but in the consciousness that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, and that a broken and contrite heart He will not despise; he comes with childlike penitence and gratitude; and with entire acknowledgment of his transgressions, and consciousness of the forgiveness of the iniquity of his sin, he offers to his God that tribute of praise *by which alone* he can glorify Him: and then, as it were, with his last breath, proclaims that in life or death he is the Lord's. Oh! what a triumph of faith over sight is that exclamation from the depths of the ocean, "Salvation is of the Lord." That cry reached no ear on earth, nor was it uttered to the sons of men; but methinks it must have rung loud and clear through the vast vault of heaven, and that angels' hearts must have throbbed with joy at the words of the repentant and believing sinner.

We heard not the words, dear friend, but *their echo* has been allowed to fall back upon our ears, that we too may rejoice, and learn the lesson their heavenly wisdom contains. First, they say to us, with unmistakeable force, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The want of this led to Jonah's first false step;—O what was the veil that hid this knowledge from his eyes? The pride of his own heart. And "when pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." Jonah

needed humility, and God thus taught it to him. Let us seek for much grace, to enable us to "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time," but let us learn from Jonah's example that while we seek to humble ourselves, and to accept in a right spirit the humbling dispensations of our God, He is able and willing to teach us to profit thereby *in the midst* of the discipline, and to give us grace and faith to offer unto Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving, whilst at the bottoms of the mountains, like Jonah, or in the extremity of bodily and personal affliction, like Job. In each and every case the Spirit's witness in the hearts of God's children is the same, "Salvation is of the Lord." How universal has the testimony of every saved sinner been to this effect. How distinct is God's teaching throughout His Word of the same truth. *O may His Spirit's free grace pour it upon both our hearts*, that in every trial, in every sorrow we may but have to rest our eye on this, for our own, and to utter with our lips for others' comfort and support, "My help is of the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth." "Truly my soul waiteth upon God : from Him cometh my salvation." "He that is our God is the God of salvation ; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains : truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

With such a rock under our feet, dear ———, the storm may blow, the rain may beat, the floods may rise, but we cannot perish. In trial, sorrow, temptation, sin, —into whatsoever depths we are fallen ; in whatsoever force the enemy may "come in like a flood," let us but



lift up our voice and cry to the Spirit to lift up this standard against unbelief and Satan, "Salvation is of the Lord," and they shall be put to flight. God's faithfulness and truth are pledged in Jesus to rescue us as well as Jonah.

Jesus will never repudiate His own words, "Whosoever cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Lord, enable us thus to overcome all things "by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of our testimony," for Jesus' sake.

Most lovingly, your friend ———.

## VIII.

### JONAH ii. 10.

"And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

O Thou who dost order all things in heaven and earth, and without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falleth to the ground, teach us by Thy Holy Spirit heartily to believe in Thine overruling providence in all things, to our great and endless comfort in Jesus, in whom all things are ours. We ask it in His Name. Amen.

Another striking lesson, dearest — — —, in the origin of all second causes; another insight into that most important truth, that nothing happens to us by chance or accident, and that no person or thing could have any power at all against us, except it were given to them from above.

“Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, if the Lord commandeth it not?” None, in heaven or earth, because greater is He that is for us than all they that can be against us; and our Saviour says, “My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand.” Now this *inability* to injure us, in all powers that oppose themselves to God, is a most consoling and important truth for the Christian to pray to have deeply engraven in his heart, because then, no matter what the trouble may be, from within or without, he at once recognizes it as being allowed by God, and under His control; and deep and bitter as the sorrow attending it may be, and overwhelming as it may at times be to his own feelings, he is still kept holding fast by the anchor, “Salvation is of the Lord,” and when “his heart is overwhelmed,” can still cry, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I”—thus it was with Jonah, and thus we see how God “heard him what time as the storm fell upon him,” and “delivered him out of his distress.” “O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth unto the children of men.”

When the history of Jonah is thus laid bare for our inspection, we read it, as it goes along, telling of cause and effect, God’s orderings, and the winds and waves, men and fish unhesitatingly fulfilling His word; and we say “What a wonderful history!” nor do we for a moment suppose, that any exertion of Jonah’s could have changed the course of events in the smallest particular. But do we, dear friend, thus regard our own lives and God’s orderings for us? Do we thus leave

second causes in their right places, and **accept** them from God, and bring them to God **in the same** unhesitating manner as we are **constrained** to do in Jonah's case, when **every link** of the chain is so clearly pointed **out that** "he who runs may read?" Ah, how much needless regret, how much rankling bitterness at the injuries inflicted on us by others, would be banished from our hearts if this were the case! How heartily should we come in all humility to the Throne of grace with the acknowledgment, that our own first false step, our own deluded neglect of obedience to our God's command to "Arise and go," had necessarily entailed on us the subsequent chastisement and correction; and accepting it as such, and spreading out our case before Him, in that spirit, should we not find peace in the midst of trial, in the lessons taught thereby to our subdued and trusting hearts? Ah, and should we not learn even to thank God for His unsparing love in not ceasing to strive with us until, by the rod of His correction, He had driven far from us the rebellious spirit with which we had so "vexed Him in the desert." See how the Holy Spirit wrought this beautiful spirit in Joseph's heart towards his brethren, that when they were covered with shame at the remembrance of their treatment of him, he could calmly and lovingly say, "Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life . . . . So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God"—is it not beautiful? And thus I feel sure it will be with every child of God, when enabled to look back on all the adverse circumstances, and all the unkind or unaccountable conduct he has met with through life, in the light of God's truth. To

each sorrow, to each individual, his heart's testimony will be, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." May the joyful and peaceful assurance of this be ours now by faith, dearest — —, as it then will be by sight. Has not Jesus said, "Because thou hast seen thou hast believed: blessed are they who not having seen yet have believed"?

Ever yours, in true love, ———.

## IX.

JONAH iii. 1—3.

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

"Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord."

O Thou, through the teaching of whose Holy Spirit we can alone discern the word of truth, we pray Thee to enable us by His aid, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the lessons here written for our learning, in the Name and for the sake of Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our last, dearest — —, we found Jonah cast by the fish, in obedience to God's command, on dry land; and whilst we feel thankful for his deliverance, I think we should naturally expect that God would leave him some little time there to recruit his strength, and perhaps to allow the impression of his late chastisement to deepen a

little more, and to draw his penitence of heart more out in prayer and supplication to his offended God.

Oh, what an insuperable difficulty it is to our poor hearts to believe heartily and entirely in the forgiveness of sins! Nothing but God's grace can give us even the slightest glimpse of it; and I do believe that hardly any Christians have the peace and happiness God intends and wishes us to have in this world, if we will only ask for it, viz., that of realizing the truth, that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,"—*then and there!* That is our difficulty. We think that, if we keep repenting and confessing our sins *through life, when we die* the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin; but to believe that the fountain is now open, and that as we bring each sin and cast it at the feet of Jesus, it is *now* blotted out, and remembered by him no more against us—O, we think, that is too good news to be true; and our evil hearts call this unbelief in God's faithfulness and truth, humility! O Thou triune Jehovah, we pray Thee to deliver us from this soul-destroying, God-dishonouring, false humility. Raise our eyes by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, and fix them on "the Lamb, as it had been slain," and enable us to see, in His finished work, the full, perfect and all-sufficient atonement and satisfaction that He made for us in His sacrifice of Himself once offered; that, whilst we bow beneath Thy chastisements, we may wait upon Thee in all patience of hope to be delivered from them in Thine own good time, for the sake of Him "who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." O teach us heartily to know and to experience "the power of His Resurrection," and to feel that we are indeed

“risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.”

We see this full and free forgiveness of acknowledged sin, in God's treatment of Jonah. A second time the message comes to him, “Arise, go unto Nineveh.” Not a word of reproach is mingled with the command, nor is it needed. God's work is perfect work; it needs neither addition nor improvement. The Spirit of God had written the lesson on Jonah's heart, and he needed no reminder. “So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Can you not imagine that, as he went calmly but promptly on his mission, the language of his heart would be, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes.” “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word!” And how he would renew his strength like the eagle's, by listening to the Spirit's voice witnessing with his, “I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of His righteousness only.” “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me. O we can fancy him journeying along, pressing the word of his God, and his blessed experience of His truth, both in correction and mercy, to his heart, basking in the sunshine of conscious forgiveness, and prepared, from the abundance of that heart, to speak with his mouth the bidding of his God. A perfect picture of one of those branches of the vine of which Jesus says, “Every branch that beareth fruit *He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*” May such be our own acceptance of our Father's dealings with us, for Jesus' sake.

Ever in true love, your attached ———.

## X.

## JONAH iii. 3—5.

"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

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O Thou who didst open the hearts of the people of Nineveh to receive the words spoken by Thy servant, we pray Thee, by the same Spirit, to give us wisdom to observe these things, that we may understand Thy loving kindness, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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When shall we learn, dearest ———, rightly to understand the irresistible power of the word of God, applied by His Spirit to the heart of man? We hear of Nineveh, "an exceeding great city"—"three days' journey" from one end to the other, and then we hear of *one man* sent to proclaim in its midst the total overthrow of all its greatness in forty days. We are lost in amazement. "Impossible!" we exclaim, "that such inadequate means can attain so great an end. No tidings uttered by his feeble voice can reach even the ears of that vast multitude, far less their hearts; why, the very utmost he could do, were he to stand, as it were, like St. Paul on Mars' Hill, and proclaim his message to the few thousands who

might gather round to hear this new thing, would be but as the dropping of a pebble in the vast ocean, producing perhaps a few circles of motion in its immediate vicinity, but leaving the wide waters around calm as before, utterly unconscious of the little agitation caused by its influence. It would seem as if God were mocking the men of Nineveh in attempting thus to warn them !”

Not so. God’s ways are not our ways, as we have already seen many times in the history of Jonah ; but His ways are “ perfect ” ways, and whether it be His will to send forth a youth armed with a sling and a stone to slay the champion of the Philistines, or to cause one feeble Jonah to utter a cry of warning in the streets of Nineveh, the result will be the same. God’s word that “ goeth forth out of His mouth shall not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto He sends it.” O, is it not very wonderful and instructive to ponder over these things, —to read the few words, the unlikely message that Jonah was sent to deliver, and its still more unexpected result ? No reasoning of man could lead us to expect that the Ninevites would have given a moment’s credence to such intelligence. We might say, Yes, we know it must be true because it is God’s word, but they do not know that ; they know nothing about Jonah ; their proud, stony, sinful hearts, so sunk in luxury and vice, will no more listen to him than the people before the flood listened to the warnings of Noah. Of course it is right for him to preach, as it was for Noah, because it is God’s command, but it will only be for their greater condemnation ; there is no hope for such as they.

Ah, poor vain ignorant heart, who maketh thee to



differ? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Talk no more so exceeding proudly, for thou too hast much to learn; to thee as well as to these dark hearts are the same words spoken, "Except ye become as little children ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." There is no more inherent goodness in thee than there was in them, and it is well for thee to remember our Saviour's warning on the subject (Matt. xii. 41), "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

I think we have spoken before on the striking brevity of Scripture sermons. A message from God, simply delivered and applied by His Spirit—and see in this instance how the instrument again disappears from view: "*Jonah* cried and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed *God*." Not a word more about *Jonah*. He thought a great deal about himself, when he was going to preach; but those who heard, and to whose hearts the words he spoke were brought home by the Spirit who spoke by him, thought nothing of him at all. When John the Baptist said to his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God," they left him and followed Jesus. In this he rejoiced; but is this our one aim and hope when we think of working for God? Do we go through life, and the various influences given us amongst great and small, seeking to live simply as lights set in the world, "holding forth the Word of Life?" Do we ask God to give us a few grains of His precious seed to scatter in the hearts around us as we go along, in calm reliance that He will water them, and

cause them to blossom and to bud in His own good time? I fear that there is but little of that amongst us. If we do not feel that *we* are appreciated; that what *we* say is esteemed and likely to be listened to for *our* sakes, how little courage, how little hope or expectation have we that it will be listened to and believed for God's sake! And yet, if it is not, it will be nothing worth. Let us think on these things, dear friend, and may God bless them to us for Jesus' sake, and enable us to speak His words "in season and out of season," with faith, and therefore with power.

Ever your loving ———.

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## XI.

### JONAH iii. 5—9.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

"For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

"And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

"But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?"

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We pray Thee, O heavenly Father, by Thy Spirit of truth, to guide us into the knowledge of all truth as it is in Jesus, for His Name's sake. Amen.

The passage transcribed is long, dearest — —, and yet we require to view it as a whole, in order to understand the wondrous effect of those few words of God, when applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of an entire nation.

How strikingly does it illustrate those words of Jeremiah xxiii. 28, 29, "He that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not My word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" And was it not thus with the Ninevites? Was not "the word of the Lord quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of their hearts"? The words of God were scarce sounded in their ears, ere the instantaneous effects were manifest. No mere words were the result of the cry uttered by the voice of that solitary man. Behold, a nation clad in sackcloth; a king and his people prostrate in the dust!

Nor was this the mere prostration of ignorant terror: we see the Spirit's work as perspicuously in the enlightenment, as in the subjugation of those dark, proud hearts. Loud and clear the order issues from the palace of the King, "Let man and beast" (not only) "be covered with sackcloth," (but) "cry mightily unto God"; and not only "cry mightily," but "let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands."

Did ever Prophet of the Old, or Apostle of the New Testament, set forth with more distinctness the nature of

that "godly sorrow" that "worketh repentance not to be repented of"? And then look at the conviction wrought in his heart at the same time, that God did not send this message in condemnation, but in warning, that they might turn and live." "Who can tell," he says, "if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?"

O it is so beautiful to trace the yearning love over poor sinners manifested in all God's dealings with man, and to feel that the same Spirit of truth, who carried conviction to the hearts of the Ninevites under the veil of mystery in the old dispensation, is He who in the full Gospel light proclaims to you and me, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

O, dear friend, ought we not to give God no rest, until He brings home with equal power to our hearts, and the hearts of all over whom He gives us any influence, these words of our Saviour, to our great and endless comfort?

How little do we realize God's great anxiety that we should be saved! How little of love, watchful and unceasing, do we recognize in all the threatening and warning providences which He utters in our ears! How do we long to escape them ourselves, and still more, perhaps, to shield those we love from the fierce blasts of the storm—and yet, why does God tell us they are sent? Just for the one object—to force us and them to seek refuge in the one only shelter, the one haven of rest. Ah, it was when the Israelites were bitten of the serpents, that they learned to look up with hope and trust to the brazen serpent. It was when the Israelites were cured by that glance of faith that they learned to look

with gratitude to the Healer of the nations. And it is when "our whole head is sick and our whole heart faint," that our God oftenest "opens our ear to discipline," and commands that we return from iniquity. Return, where? Is there no shelter provided for the poor outcast? Weary and heavy-laden, is he to retrace his steps he knows not whither? Listen, poor heart, to the words of God, and may He grant you strength to believe them in their length and breadth: "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly." He is ready, He is willing to shelter us and to supply all our need, and He hath said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will *in no wise* cast out." Dear friend, if we have found these words true in our own case, let us ask for strength to speak them faithfully and simply to our fellow-sinners. He who blessed the word spoken to the Ninevites, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"; and He has promised that "His word shall not return unto Him void, but that it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto He sends it."

Ever your's lovingly ———.

## XII.

## JONAH iii. 10.

“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way ; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them ; and He did it not.”

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Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the Name and for the sake of Jesus.

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There are two things which strike me in the reading of this verse, my dearest — ——. First, how much safety there is in reading the Bible consecutively, and not in isolated passages.

Now, when you and I read here that God changed His mind towards the Ninevites on seeing their works, it does not startle us, and make us think “Here is a verse that supports the doctrine of justification by works,” because we remember the means used to turn God’s eyes upon the change in their conduct—“They cried mightily unto God.” Here we trace the continuance of the Spirit’s work in their hearts ; having first opened their hearts to receive the things spoken by Jonah, we next find Him influencing them to “cry mightily unto God,” and now, to manifest the change wrought in them, by turning from their evil ways ; the whole process of imparted life and growth is thus arranged in order in our minds, and we are neither startled nor surprised by the results. Yes, we say, God saw that they turned from

their evil ways, and His anger was turned away ; but His ear heard the cry of confession, the cry of penitence first ; their works proved the sincerity of that cry ; God's work in them was accomplished, and He in faithfulness and justice "forgave their sins, and cleansed them from all unrighteousness."

It is thus that in reading the various parts of Scripture in unbroken chains, we find how very perfect they are as wholes, and how impossible it really is for one part to contradict the other.

My other remark is a short one, or I should not venture on a second to-day. It is this, That the expression of God's repenting always sounds strangely to us, because in our minds repentance is always associated with sin and sorrow for it ; but the word "repent," or "repentance," only means "to change our mind," or "a change of mind," and has no complex meaning attached to it ; and you will find the term constantly used as spoken by God, both with regard to His dealings in mercy and in judgment, that He repented Him of the good, or repented Him of the evil He had done to the rebellious or penitent Israelites ; and it is very interesting to go through the different passages where He thus expresses Himself ;\* in some, urging them to repentance in order that He may repent towards them, pleading so touchingly with them, and declaring, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?"

Dear friend, the Ninevites took God at His word, and He repented towards them ; shall our evil ways keep us

\* Jer. xviii. 7—10 ; Ezek. xviii. 21—23 ; xxxiii. 10, 11.

silent towards Him? O let it not be so! Let us not thus dishonour him. No matter what our sin may be, or what its threatened punishment, let us remember the backsliding Jonah and the awakened Ninevites, and the lesson that we learn from them in our Saviour's words: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." God only waits to hear our cry, that He may "repent of the evil that He hath said He would do unto us, and do it not."

Ever your loving ———.

### XIII.

JONAH iv. 1—3.

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

"And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.

"Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the Name and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

Again dearest ———, do we see brought out in the strongest relief, the immeasurable contrast between the heart of God, and the heart of man. O how fearful it is to mark the spirit of revenge that burns in the hearts even of the best of men; and how they long to see their poor fellow-sinners' punishment, rather than



in the spirit of their God, to see their sin purged away. How thankful we feel that it was to God and not to Jonah that the poor Ninevites cried for mercy! They might have spent that precious forty days' respite in trying to propitiate him to intercede for them—and tried in vain. But who ever cried to God, and was not heard? Who ever came to Him, and was in any wise cast out? Happy those, who, in their direst extremity, act like these poor sinners, and, looking past man and what he can do, and past their sins and what they have done, fix their eyes on their gracious and merciful God, and cry mightily unto Him who is so ready to hear, and so longing to “repent Him of the evil.”

But it is not from the Ninevites alone that we are intended to learn a lesson. Surely Jonah's anger, his rebellious prayer, and the whole disclosure of the working of his heart, contain a very solemn and instructive warning. May God bless it to us, for Jesus' sake.

We should have thought, that if ever there was a man likely to appreciate God's mercy to repentant sinners, it would have been Jonah. Just rescued as he had himself been from the depths of despair, we should have expected from him the fullest sympathy in their fear, the most urgent exhortations to repentance, the heartiest congratulations on their deliverance. Dear friend, such we should have expected from Jonah—but why? are such the feelings of our own hearts? Alas, I fear not. Which of *us* is there, who in seeing others do what he feels to be very wrong, and in hearing them say what he feels to be very wrong, does not feel, in his virtuous indignation, that he wishes they were well punished, instead of being deeply grieved for their sin, and earnestly desirous

for their repentance and amendment? Remember, these were not people with whom Jonah had any natural affinity or ties of kindred and regard; they were a wicked and ungodly nation, on whom no doubt he looked with contempt as well as anger. "Stand by, I am holier than thou," throbbed through every vein of his heart toward them. What then must have been his wrath and vexation when he saw in God's conduct towards them, that He was indeed, "no respecter of persons;" that His hatred of sin in them was as distinct from His love for the poor sinner as it was with regard to Jonah himself! and that when they turned and repented at His word, they received the same pardon, the same deliverance from punishment, in the fulness of God's everlasting love, as he, the chosen prophet of the Lord, had done. O, how little we understand, how little we enter into, and how little we, by nature, relish, this utter absence of all favouritism in God's dealings with man! And yet, with the warnings of Elijah, Jonah, and the apostles before us, all detected in being ignorant of what manner of spirit they were, shall we not do well to take heed to ourselves, lest we also offend thus against the Lord? In all humility let us say, Who can tell how oft he offendeth? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Dear friend, let us never think that we have enough of "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts;" we know that the knowledge of His love to us can alone draw out ours to Him, or to our fellow-man: we daily need it; let it be a subject of daily request. The supply is unfailing; it is freely offered; let us "open our mouths wide" that "God may fill" them. Let us never let Him alone until He take from us these stony hearts, and give us new, wide,

loving hearts, wherein His own pure hatred of sin and love to man, reign to His glory and our everlasting peace.

Ever your loving ———.

#### XIV.

JONAH iv. 4, 5.

“Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?”

“So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.”

Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the Name and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

How extraordinary, my dearest — — —, does this at first sight appear to us; the great God condescending thus gently to reason with His rebellious servant, the proud and passionate sinner not even deigning to vouchsafe a reply! Do we not wonder that the earth did not open and swallow him up, or the lightning from heaven lay him low, for the insult thus offered to his long-suffering God? At first we think so, and very indignant we feel with poor Jonah; but which of us, on reflection, and listening to the voice of conscience, can say that the still small voice might not reply to us, Thou art the man? O which of us has not been conscious of experiencing just as unreasonable anger at God's dealing with our fellow-men? Which of us has not been conscious of preserving

a rebellious silence towards God, when the question has stirred in our hearts, "Doest thou well to be angry?" How ashamed we feel, when conscience is once thus awake, and we see ourselves in Jonah walking sullenly out of the city and sitting himself down to commune with his own evil thoughts, "till he might see what would become of the city." He could not bear to think that it would escape wholly unpunished, that not one spark of divine vengeance should fall on its devoted head. O, how we shudder to think that we should ever harbour such thoughts! How do we even at times exclaim, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" And yet memory tells us that, when the temptation came, when the sin of others came into collision with our evil hearts, the same spirit that agitated Jonah worked within our own breasts, and it was with "the wrath of man" that we would fain have "worked the righteousness of God." I think, that turning away from God's question, that drawing the shoulder away from the reminding touch, implied consciousness that he was wrong, but would not acknowledge it, for he did not wish to be right; and the impression it conveys to us, that he felt still more irritated against God, and yet did not dare to give further vent to his feelings, is all brought home with wonderful power to us in this verse. The very air is as it were impregnated with the odour of the smouldering fire that was soon to burst forth from that now silent heart; we feel what is coming, and we tremble for him, for we too know little, O how little, of the heart of Him against whom he was thus rebelling. We too are slow to learn what a long-suffering God is ours, how slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. Let us ask God to teach

us these two lessons from these verses: First, what an unspeakably gracious God watches over us, and chides us even in the midst of our rebellion against Him; and Secondly, how utterly incompatible it is with a Christian spirit to cherish anger under the name of virtue in our hearts. God has here drawn aside the veil, and let us see in Jonah what we are slow to acknowledge in ourselves, that our hearts are naturally so prone to evil, that we grudge to see the same mercy extended to our fellow-sinners as to ourselves. Whenever then we feel that the sins of others awaken anger instead of sorrow in us; whenever we are silent towards God, and “restrain prayer” to Him to cleanse their hearts and renew a right spirit within them, let us think of Jonah. Let us see ourselves in him; let us “abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Ever your loving Friend ———.

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## XV.

### JONAH iv. 6.

“And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.”

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Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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Again, dearest ———, we are struck with astonishment at the disclosure of the minuteness of the care, and

the *preparing* love of our God for the correction and instruction of His rebellious children. Is it not wonderful to think of Him "who sitteth on the circle of the earth," and in whose sight "the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers," *preparing* a gourd to grow up over Jonah, that its shadow might deliver him from his grief! Ah, I am sure, when the day comes that we shall know even as we are known, that we shall learn that everything our God does has a *meaning* in it, to a degree of which now we cannot conceive. The history of Jonah is very teaching in this way; the springs of action, and the causes of events are laid so bare to our view. Now in this, and the two following verses, we are told of *three several preparations* of the Lord, of apparently very different natures; but all designed to combine in one powerful appeal to Jonah's personal experience, and to convince him how wrong he had been in indulging in such bitter and revengeful feelings towards the Ninevites.

First, God shows compassion for his grief, and in His longsuffering love, instead of punishing him for the sinfulness of its origin, He sends an unlooked-for and unasked blessing to deliver him from his grief, and, as it were, by His enduring love, to melt the hard heart that was so ready to steel itself against its fellows: but, alas, for the narrow selfishness of the human heart, Jonah could enjoy the blessing bestowed on himself, far as he was from deserving it; he could be "exceeding glad of the gourd," but no spark of better feeling awoke in his breast, no warmth of gratitude was kindled in his heart, no tear of contrition filled his eye; he rejoiced in the gift, but he rebelled still against the Giver.

Dear friend, how we wonder at Jonah, how hard we think him, how ungrateful ; and yet have God's dealings with us produced their right effect ? How many a time has "a great fish" (in *our* case, in the form of an unlooked-for means) been prepared by our God to rescue us from the depths into which our own misconduct had plunged us ; how many times have we been brought again into positions of usefulness ; how many times, when we have been thus brought up again from the depths, have we, instead of being humbled in the remembrance of our sins, speedily cast it behind us, and grown proud and unsympathizing towards those whose misconduct is offensive to us : and then, if we have heard that God has shewn mercy on them also, have we rejoiced as over a fresh deliverance for ourselves, or have we not rather been sceptical as to the truth of the statement, and nourished a secret resentment in our hearts that such as they should be destined to receive "every man a penny," even as we ourselves ?

Oh, it is hard, hard work for us, practically, to accept God's truth, that all sinners out of Christ "are equally under condemnation," and that to all sinners "in Christ," there is equally "no condemnation." God alone can make us understand it. I do think the idea of purgatory is wonderfully adapted to the human mind ; its pains and its penalties duly proportioned, so exactly correspond to our feelings *towards others*, at all events, and are so much more comprehensible than the full, free, and everlasting love of God to us, while we were yet sinners. This does indeed require a new heart to understand its breadth and length, and depth and height. But we have yet another comparison of ourselves with Jonah

before we cease for to-day. Have we not often, when aware that we were indulging in hard thoughts of some of God's orderings for us, (ah, and at the same time keeping silence towards Him from the very self-conviction that we were wrong,) been conscious of the bestowal of some unexpected blessing that made us exceeding glad? At first, perhaps, there might be a qualm of conscience as to its being undeserved, and a feeling of almost surprise that it was granted; but soon the convictions have been stifled, the surprise has ceased, and with ungrateful joy and much self-gratulation we have sunk into repose under its welcome shadow. Ah, how few of us have gone forth from our slumber strong in the gratitude it ought to have aroused, and with hearts eager to forgive our poor brethren the hundred pence they owe us, for the sake of Him who has first forgiven us the ten thousand talents! And yet, if God's undeserved mercies have not this effect upon us, wherein do we differ from Jonah, whom we so freely condemn? I confess I feel the study of his character a most humbling, as I trust it is also a profitable one.

Ever, in true love, yours ———.

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## XVI.

## JONAH iv. 7.

“But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered.”

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Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the Name, and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

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Another marvellous disclosure of a fresh link in the chain of providential preparations, my dearest ———. Last time we watched the preparation and brief enjoyment of pleasure; now we see the hidden messenger of woe fulfilling his mission of destruction; unseen, unheard, and oh, how unexpected by the unconscious Jonah, his fair gourd is smitten by his side. Dear friend, to us who are looking on, and to whom everything is explained, as scene after scene in Jonah's history passes before our eyes, it is comparatively easy to understand the workings of God's mysterious dealings with him; but just fancy yourself in his place, and think how utterly inexplicable it must all have been to him. The gourd was given to him unsought: he rejoiced exceedingly in its grateful shade; he did *nothing wrong* with the gourd; it afforded him most innocent enjoyment; probably in his self-satisfaction he almost imagined himself at peace with all the world. Why then should it be thus ruthlessly torn from him? Or why given, if only to be left until it became necessary to his happiness? Truly God's

ways are past man's finding out, and very hard and incomprehensible must this fresh affliction have seemed to Jonah ; for we must remember that all this time he considered his wrath at the sparing of the Ninevites as quite justifiable ; his conscience was still asleep, though his pride and self-love were so wide awake ; therefore, unhumbled and unsubmissive, he struggled against his hard fate. But I am anticipating in speaking of what is not told us until the next verse. Let us rather retrace our steps in search of the lesson contained in this. First, we learn how impossible it very often is to understand God's dealings with us at the time. He gives us a gourd ; we rejoice in it : He smites it ; we are in despair. If we are God-fearing people we most likely worry ourselves well-nigh to death thinking what we could have done wrong about it ? how we can have misused our precious gourd, and thus caused it to be taken from us ? Because our affections have been centered on it, we conclude that it is equally important in God's sight, and that therefore His anger towards us must be on its account. But stop ! What has thus engrossed our hearts may be but some poor gourd in God's sight ; something that could contribute to our personal gratification, but in a very small degree to His glory. Our selfishness has shut our hearts tight against the influence of that love towards Him and our fellow men, and the only entrance we have left open for our feelings to be touched, is through our self-interest and gratification : it is very sad, but our loving Father will not leave us alone to perish in our delusion. Into the one little open chink He puts a wedge ; farther and farther it gains entrance. The breach widens, and the heart takes it in ; there is joy at its entrance, for where is

there a heart so withered as not to rejoice when it finds a suitable object on which to expend its affection? But this is only the first step in the lesson. Our vulnerable part has been made more sensitive in order that our hearts may be taught through their own experience what they have refused to learn through the experience of others. The worm is sent; our gourd is blighted, despairingly we ask, Why? Let us look back. Is there no old rebellion slumbering in our hearts? Are there no Ninevites ready to perish, whom we have been unwilling to stretch out the brother's hand to save, and to the rescue of whose immortal souls from destruction, we have at least been indifferent, if not rebellious?

O dear friend, how little we are given to regard duty as God regards it! How prone we are to tend our gourds that we love, whilst we grievously displease God by our neglect of the Ninevites whom we hate! How diligently we search into our conduct towards those we love and dread to lose! How coldly we turn our back on all enquiry into our treatment of those we disregard and would fain forget. Alas! alas! Jonah is not the only poor sinner who has to look beyond his cherished flower, to find the reason for the worm prepared to smite it at its roots!

Ever your loving friend, ———.

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## XVII.

JONAH iv. 8.

“ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.”

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Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake.  
Amen.

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We have come to God's third and last preparation, in the teaching of Jonah, dearest — —, and how mingled are the feelings with which we read of the heating of the furnace thus seven times hotter than before! We deeply sympathise with the sufferer as we see the poor proud heart beaten down and down, till at last, unconsciousness for a time is allowed to suspend his misery. And yet at the same time that we feel all this, we have a thorough and heartfelt consciousness that He who has prepared all this needed fuel to the flame, is the same God of love who has prepared all blessings for him heretofore, and that not a shadow of a change has come between His everlasting love and the poor wayward servant whom He will not spare for his crying, and out of whose heart He was driving the folly that was so bound up in it by nature. We know that it must be done; we know that Almighty wisdom is directing all; we see the Refiner sitting by the fire watching the progress of His

work ; we feel that there is One walking in the fire, "like unto the Son of Man," leading Jonah through his great and sore troubles, who will yet bring him out into a wealthy place ; and, while we hold our breath, watching what the end may be, we never for a moment doubt that it will result to Jonah's profit, and to the glory of God. Yes, dear friend, we feel thus satisfied about God's dealings with Jonah, and because we have seen, we have believed ; but shall we not pray that the study of his life, and his errors, and his instruction, may be very profitable to us for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness ? Shall we not ask to have our wills subdued, our hearts enlarged, our selfishness corrected ? Shall we not, with all humility, acknowledge with Jeremiah, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself ; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment ; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing." Who would not rather be loved and corrected like Jonah, than have the fearful sentence, pronounced on Ephraim, "He is joined to idols : let him alone ?" Oh, let us learn more to trust God in His correction of us ; to thank Him for His watchfulness over us ; to come to Him in more childlike faith, asking Him to "search us and know our hearts, to try us and to know our thoughts ; to "see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting." Then, even when our gourd withers ; when the east wind blows, and when the sun beats upon our heads, we shall be able to trust Him still—to say "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." We shall pray and not faint," and, "humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt us in due time."

Yes, we shall indeed be exalted, but no longer in ourselves—we shall have been mercifully emptied of that. Now, to our endless comfort, He will exalt us in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He will “strengthen” us “in the Lord, and” we “shall walk up and down in His name, saith the Lord.”

Ever your loving friend, ———.

## XVIII.

JONAH iv. 9—11.

“And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the Name and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

We thus come to the close of the Book of Jonah, dearest ———, and from first to last the same lesson is impressed upon us—the great value God puts upon immortal souls. We see Him “rising early and late,” as He says Himself—sending messages of warning and reproof to the multitudes at Nineveh; setting before them life and death, and commanding them to “choose

life," crying by His prophet, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil way, for why will ye die?" We see Him preparing reproof after reproof for the teaching of the individual sinner Jonah, and by "line upon line, and precept upon precept," instructing him in the heavenly lesson that God willeth not the death of a sinner, but will have all men come to repentance. Just the same lesson that Jesus taught, when He said, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Oh, how slow we all are to believe this!—to believe that salvation is God's one message to man *now*, for that "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," and that our whole energy ought to be exercised in taking heed for ourselves, and exhorting others to beware, lest we or they "neglect so great salvation." God says, "Come." We should say "Come." The one fatal and inexcusable error is—staying away.

How touching is the inference to be drawn from what God says to Jonah about the gourd—"Thou hast had pity on the gourd for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow." Does not this shew us, dear friend, the labour and the care that God bestows on every one of His creatures, and the deep and loving compassion with which He regards the most rebellious and ungrateful amongst men? Oh, I am sure we do not dwell half enough upon this thought; we do not pray half enough to be enabled to enter into the feeling with which Jesus wept over Jerusalem, when uttering the tender reproof—"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." How shall we ever realize the

grief contained in those few words, telling of the rejection of that salvation which He was about to purchase with His own blood?

Oh, what can be so calculated to break the hard rocky hearts of men in pieces, as the knowing, that whilst they were yet sinners, God thus loved them—and that, rebellious and stubborn as they are, He still labours for them, and spares them, not from “slackness concerning His promise, as some men count slackness,” but because “He is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

We hear no more of Jonah. May we not hope that the gracious words of his longsuffering God brought conviction and repentance home to his rebellious heart? Surely he must have hid his face for shame at the vivid contrast there presented to him, between his own feelings, and the everlasting love thus gently rebuking him. God grant that we too may thus profit, by the study of his history, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Ever in true affection, your friend, ———.

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## XIX.

ST. LUKE xi. 29, 30, 32.

“And when the people were gathered thick together, He began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.

“For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation.

“The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

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Teach us, O God, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the Name and for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

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In the present day, dearest ———, when so many efforts are being made to explain away whatever in the Bible is not easily understood by our natural reason, I doubt not there are some who would laugh at our simple belief in the fact of Jonah's having existed three days and three nights in the whale, and would declare that his whole history was of an allegorical character, and could only be taken literally by the ignorant and unlearned. It is pleasant then to be able to turn to our Saviour's words, where in rebuking the unbelief of those around Him, He tells them that the only sign that shall be given them shall be the one typified by Jonah's miraculous preservation in the whale, viz., that of the resurrection of the Son of Man, after He had been three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Had not the Jews been aware of the reality of Jonah's case, it would have had no force with

them as an illustration, and our Saviour could not have blamed them for not believing in what He declared to them to be a manifestation of power, similar to that shewn by God in behalf of Jonah. But it is with the application our Saviour makes of the Ninevites' repentance at the preaching of Jopas, that we have the chief concern, for it imports *us* to consider this, as much as it did that crowd of people "gathered thick together." "A greater than Jonas" speaks to us; we too shall meet the Ninevites in the day of judgment. Do we believe God, as they did? Do we humble ourselves under His mighty hand, as they did, that in due time He may exalt us? Ah, dear friend, this is not a question for us to put to ourselves but *once in our lives*, for it is not once in our lives only, that our hearts rebel against God; it is not once in our lives only, that our evil hearts of unbelief need the solemn warning, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." What then, at such times, are we to gather, in instruction and reproof, from the example of the Ninevites? Much, every way. We are taught by them neither to trifle with God's warnings, nor to limit His grace: they at once believed their danger; they equally believed in God's willingness to pardon, and in His power to save. Dear friend, let us remember for ourselves, and for those we love, that if we doubt God in either of these particulars, the Ninevites will yet rise in judgment against us. May God deliver us all from our evil hearts of unbelief, for Jesus' sake.

Ever your loving friend, ———.



















